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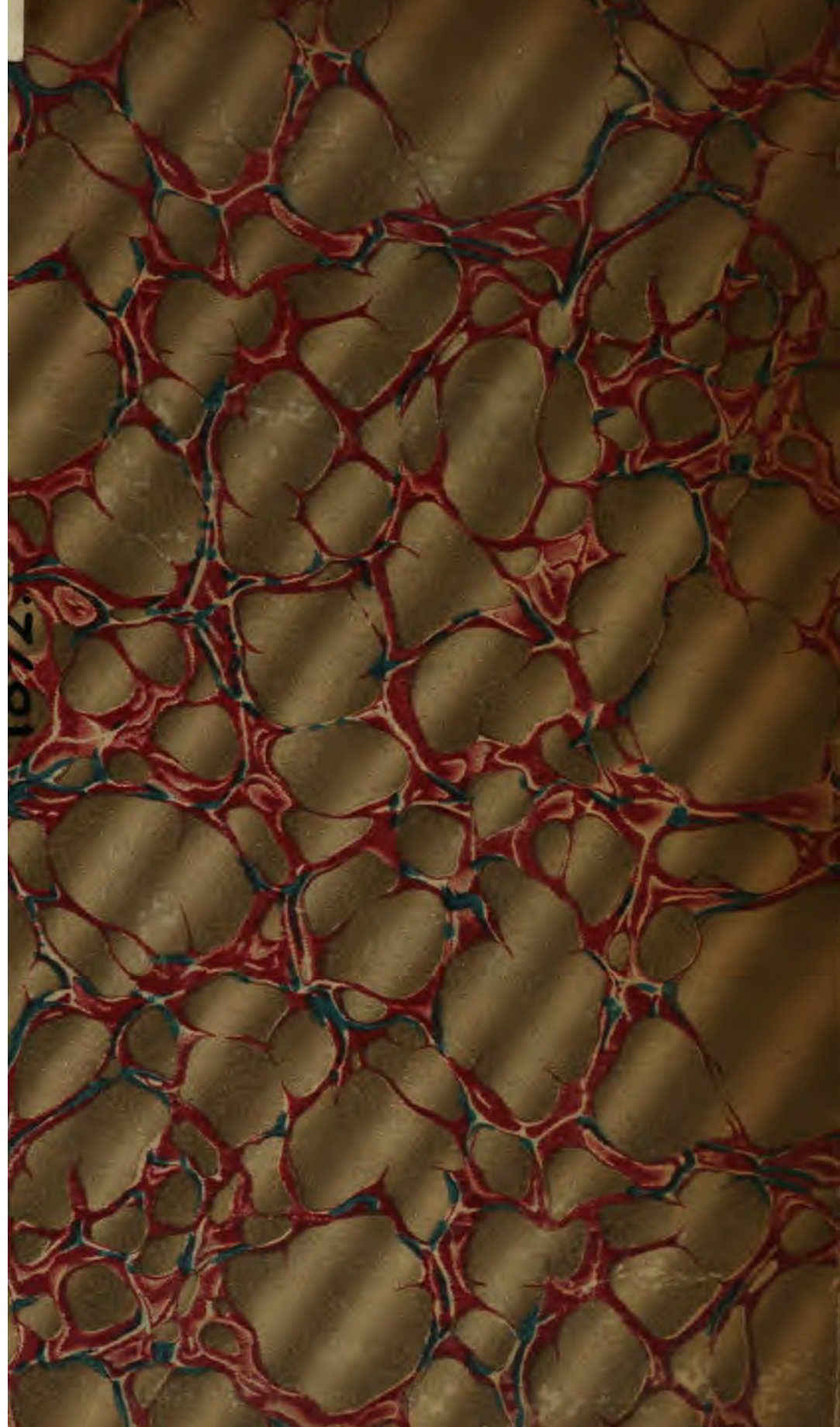
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**THE BEQUEST OF  
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GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

Chancellor

OF THE

University of the State of New York

A MEMORIAL ADDRESS

BY

HON. CHARLES E. FITCH



University of the State of New York

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## Address

IN MEMORY OF

Chancellor GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

1824-1892

Delivered by Regent Charles E. Fitch

AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE

REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY, SENATE CHAMBER, 14 DECEMBER 1892

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1892

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1918

**GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS**

*Born 24 February 1824 Died 31 August 1892*

*Elected Regent of the University, 12 April 1864*

*Elected Vice-Chancellor, 14 January 1886*

*Elected Chancellor, 30 January 1890*

## GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

We meet, this evening, to pay respect to the memory of two of our distinguished dead, but as there are days in June which seem to enfold themselves in the splendor and to exhale the perfume of all the summer time, so this is an occasion that revives the sentiments and quickens the emotions of other occasions of kindred import, the one including and interpreting the rest. Its peculiar sadness is invested with comprehensive significance. Membership in this board is the constant monition of our common mortality. Of those who participated in its councils, 20 years ago, not one survives. Frequent have been our memorial services, and one voice especially has declared our frequent sorrow. It was a voice of surpassing richness and exquisite melody. No dissonance disturbed its harmony; no false inflection debased its golden cadence. In tone, in compass, in expression, it was music's self; and nowhere did it vibrate to a more rhythmic chord, nor thrill to a tenderer strain than here, where attuned by affection, sensitive to their virtues, tolerant of their infirmities and mindful of their labors, it sang the requiem for our departed ones. And that voice has ceased. There is a void we can not fill.

When some beloved voice, that was to you  
Both sound and sweetness, faileth suddenly,  
And silence against which you dare not cry,  
Aches round you like a strong disease and new—  
What hope? What help? What music will undo  
That silence to your sense?

Reverently and modestly, I trust, do I break that silence, at your behest, for I know that my speech is inadequate to his desert. Speech, however, is made the easier for me, if

I but echo that of others. I can simply join in the accordant tribute to his excellence by his fellow-journalists, by his companions in the guild of letters, by his co-workers in the causes of education and reform, all testifying to the light and beauty and fragrance, the strength and sincerity and symmetry of his life. That life is singularly open to the review, as it was singularly free and limpid in its flow. It sought no hidden recesses, nor tortuous ways. Its current was as full and forceful, as it was sparkling and fascinating. I know no life which was more transparent. The purer the spring, the less subtle is its analysis. It was not that this life was without its reserves, its reticencies and its dignities, but its purpose and its tenor are luminous in the revelation. Critics may vary in their estimates of the literary genius of George William Curtis — its quality and its permanence — and scribes may question the wisdom of some of his political judgments, but none who knew him will differ as to the integrity of his motives, his fidelity to his convictions, or the chivalry, compact of courtesy and courage, with which he upheld them. His manhood is serene against assault. Take from him his winning personality, the amenities that emanated from him, the refinements he cultivated, the associations and endearments that threw an ideal charm about his career, and there remains an inherent manhood, consistent in its growth, developing noble and yet nobler proportions, until, in its rounded completeness, it stands as one of the comeliest and most commanding figures of its epoch. With that manhood as our central thought, let us note something of the processes of its evolution.

George William Curtis was born in Providence, R. I., February 24, 1824. Not less favored was he, from the first, by innate grace than by outward fortune. He was of the best Puritan lineage: his father was a prosperous merchant; his home was the abode of comfort and happiness. He had precious gifts of form, of feature, of taste, of feeling, of aspiration. His heart was responsive to the attractions of art

and nature, and the honey of Hymettus was on his lips. In the exuberance of youth, he seemed exotic to the New England air, but the roots of his being were planted deeply in and clung tenaciously to its rugged soil. If the efflorescence was of Italian skies or breathed the odors of the orient, the trunk was of sturdy native growth, and the ripened fruitage was sound to the core. He was of Massachusetts stock, but he was born on the ground where Roger Williams, fleeing from the persecution of the Massachusetts theocracy, found refuge in the primeval forest, made its umbrageous aisles vocal with his hymns of praise, and there builded a commonwealth, whose corner-stone was the principle of the absolute separation of church and state. Upon all this broad continent, there is no spot more hallowed than that thus selected and dedicated. From none has proceeded a more genuine American inspiration — not from Concord bridge

Where the embattled farmers stood,  
And fired the shot heard round the world,

nor from Independence Hall where, in exultant peal, freedom hailed the advent of the republic, nor from Gettysburg, where the confederacy was shattered and Lincoln spoke. And this was the inspiration of the ingenuous boy, who sported by Seekonk cove or mused by the walls of Hope college, 60 years ago — an inspiration, which, if for a time inert, survived the allurements of travel, the brief intoxication of social success, and the bland temptations of a generous culture, restrained the debonair youth from dilettanteism, and resolved the litterateur into the patriot, so that, at the last, he might say, with Lowell,

I sank too deep in the soft-stuffed repose,  
That hears but rumors of earth's wrongs and woes:  
Too well these Capuas could my muscles waste,  
Not void of toils, but toils of choice and taste.  
These still had kept me could I but have quelled  
The Puritan drop that in my veins rebelled.

Curtis was not what is known as a college-bred man, but his education, pursued in a unique community of thinkers and theorists, and supplemented by a course of study in a German university, was certainly more than equivalent to that which he could have obtained from the narrow curriculum of any American college of the day. His later affiliations with college men were close. Brown university enrolled him among her alumni. Several of the leading institutions of the higher learning conferred their honorary degrees upon him, and he was the favorite orator at college festivals. By aptitude and equipment, he belonged to the sodality of American scholars with which this body, in its representative capacity, is incorporate, and to the headship of which he came as naturally, as properly. His early schooling, glimpses of which are disclosed in his novel of *Trumps*, was at Jamaica Plain, near Boston, and then, after a year under a private tutor and another in a mercantile house, in New York, whither his parents had removed, he became, at the age of 16, a pupil at Brook Farm.

Brook Farm, an idyl set in the prose of American life, almost a dim and fading legend now, was a brave, if vain attempt to better the social and to exalt the intellectual order. It tried to combine philosophy and the plow, poetry and the wash-tub. It was an enthusiasm, and it was "a dreamer of dreams;" but its enthusiasm was for the progress of the race, and its dreams were ecstasies of hope for the amelioration of human ills. It was communal without being tainted with passion; it made work honorable; and even its drudgery was conformed to the precept of quaint George Herbert,

Who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,  
Makes that and th' action fine.

Withal, Brook Farm had an admirable teaching force, directed by George Ripley, afterward the eminent literary editor of the New York *Tribune*, and a liberal course of study. There Curtis also heard the brilliant talk of Marga-

ret Fuller and the weird conceits of Nathaniel Hawthorne, and thither came, as frequent visitors, Theodore Parker, then in the first years of his aggressive ministry, the sage of Concord bringing pearls of thought, and the gentle hermit of Walden pond unfolding the secrets of the woods and fields. With "the plain living and high thinking" of the transcendentalists, Curtis received his second inspiration.

At the age of 22 he started on a memorable pilgrimage, entering the old world by the gateway of the Mediterranean, landing at Marseilles, and, from there, roaming in leisurely fashion, for four years, through Europe and the East, his tour being interrupted only by a short period of study in Berlin. This tour, over the incidents of which I wish I might linger, was a delightful experience for Curtis, as it has been a rare source of delight to his readers, as drawn upon for the reveries of the *Howadji* and the reminiscences of the *Easy Chair*. With ample store of classic, historic and romantic lore, with the taste of the artist and the soul of the poet, with ruddy health and cheerful spirits, his enjoyment was as keen as his personality was attractive, reminding us of that other Puritan youth, John Milton, who, two centuries before, had gone from the scholarly seclusion of his English home, to feel the rapture of Italian verse and view the marvels of Italian art. Everywhere, the eyes of Curtis caught the local coloring, and, from the galleries of Dresden, the Louvre and the Vatican, from

Storyed windows richly dight,  
Casting a dim religious light,

from the majesty of Memnon and the mute mystery of the Sphinx, from the stormy chorus of the students in the battle-summer of '48, from the typical tragedy of the Palazzo Sangrigo, portrayed in the *Shrouded Portrait*, and, from things new and old, grave and gay, his plastic mind received impressions that were reproduced in his works, in engaging form and with perfect finish. He was an accomplished traveler, ranking as such with Irving and Kinglake. He had con-

genial companions in his wanderings — Kensett and Hicks, Hedge and Cranch and Tiffany — who were to acquire reputations in their respective walks, and he made acquaintance with the Brownings, Thackeray, and other celebrated authors, who, in turn, confessed their liking for the bright and genial young American, even then remarkable for his conversational talent. In 1850, he left Europe, which he never revisited, although two presidents, at least, tendered him high diplomatic appointments; and, perhaps, as Edward Cary says, this “is not to be regretted, since the Europe that gleams through 40 years of the *Easy Chair* is the Europe of that day, smiling, romantic with a touch of adventure and a charm that is as completely vanished as the packet ship that bore the unhurried traveler to its shores.”

Curtis returned to New York to make literature his profession, his first regular employment in journalism being on the New York *Tribune*, to which he had already written letters from abroad. The *Tribune* had then been established about nine years, had become a vital political force, and was vieing with the *Evening Post* in literary skill. Its staff was a notable one, embracing several of Curtis's old friends of the Brook Farm community. Charles A. Dana was the managing editor; George Ripley was the book reviewer; Margaret Fuller was a welcome contributor; Bayard Taylor was alternately an editorial writer and a correspondent from “far Cathay;” and, over all, was Horace Greeley, the most original, the most intrepid, and the most masterful of American editors. Curtis was the musical and dramatic critic — for his pen as yet, ran mainly along esthetic lines — and he drew those pleasing sketches of the watering places that were subsequently collected in book form as *Lotus Eating*. He also supplied airy fancies for the *Knickerbocker* — a mélange of wit and wisdom giving foretaste of the royal feasts of *Harper's* and the *Century*.

In 1851, *Nile Notes* appeared and was soon succeeded by the *Howadji in Syria*. The one has certain verbal redundancies and affectations, cloying upon our matured taste,

from which the other is measurably free, but each is fine in temper, delicate in sentiment, elegant in scholarship and limns with photographic accuracy the picturesque languor of the ancient lands. Curtis, at the first, was enticed and bewildered by the opulence of his vocabulary, but he speedily recovered his poise, eliminated impurities from his style and wrought it into a diction as chaste as it is agreeable. "Poetry," says Coleridge, "is the best words in the best order:" and such is the prose poetry of George William Curtis. In 1853, *Putnam's*, the second of American magazines of the newer era, *Harper's* having preceded it by three years, was started, and Curtis was enlisted in its service. Intellectually, it was a credit to periodical literature. Financially, it was unfortunate, and when a crisis in its affairs was reached, in 1857, Curtis was a special business partner. His private fortune was swept away, and, in addition, there were obligations, which he voluntarily assumed, to whose discharge he devoted years of unremitting effort, applying thereto nearly all the receipts from his lyceum lectures. When he stepped from the platform, in 1873, the burden had been lifted, and he was a free man. He never, I believe, ascended it again for pay. This is an interesting episode in his career, the vindication of an acute sense of honor, and finds its counterpart only in the herculean task of Sir Walter Scott in his settlement with the creditors of Ballantyne and Co. To *Putnam's*, Curtis gave some of his choicest work, including *Homes of American Authors*, the *Potiphar Papers*, and *Prue and I*. The "homes" are those of Emerson, Longfellow, Bancroft and Hawthorne, in all of which he was a familiar guest. The *Potiphar Papers* is a keen inspection of the frivolities and pretensions of "our best society." Too truthful for irony, it is too kindly for contumely. It is the philosopher in dress coat, who has the entrée of the circle, quizzing its foibles, and not the cynic in hair cloth, railing at its exclusiveness from the area. It is cleverly written and furnishes, in that of "the Rev. Cream Cheese," at least one

MS - (list of  
unpublished  
G. W. C.  
author  
of Bancroft  
Homes

to the noted names in fiction. *Prue and I* is as lovely a bit of sentiment and lambent humor as there is in the language. Is the recent encomium of Laurence Hutton excessive? He says: "It is Addison with a warmth and humanness that Addison never knew. It is Lamb, with a grace and delicacy that Lamb's time did not bequeath to him. It is Sidney, with the lightest modern touch, and a new learned simplicity. It is the sweetest, gentlest, serenest, loftiest, most cultured of scholars, who, in the homely guise of this modest clerk, enchants the reader with his airy fancy and rich imagination."

In October 1853, Curtis first wrote for the *Easy Chair*, and from April 1854 it bore the sole stamp of his individuality. In 1863 he was installed as editor of *Harper's Weekly*, and, in these connections, he remained until his death. He was also the "Lounger" of the *Weekly* and made "Manners upon the road," for the *Bazar*, but upon the first two he expended his main force, and upon the conduct of these departments his reputation largely rests. How dissimilar and yet how similar they are. Both are grounded in principle, both are conformed to exalted ideals, both are drawn from the "well of English undefiled;" but the one is simple, concise, unembellished; the other is buoyant and supple, and upon it jewels glitter. The one is robust, the other polished. The one contends in the dust of the arena; the other rambles in the forest of Arden or meditates in the groves of Academus. The advocate is in the one, the scholar is in the other, and the gentleman is in both. Curtis's weekly articles, models of a perspicuous style, were able, candid and dispassionate in their treatment of public questions, were widely quoted, and were cogent in their influence upon public opinion, more cogent than the utterances of any other American editor, with the exception of Greeley. The *Easy Chair* is one of the fairest products of modern literature, and, in saying this, I believe I am not betrayed by the partiality of my love, for I am sure it will stand the severest critical tests. How pure,

how fresh, how exhilarating it is! To how many hearts has it appealed as "guide, philosopher and friend!" How varied its themes, how catholic its vision, how radiant its spirit! It is the consummate flower of expression. I am firm in the faith that the *Easy Chair* will be a classic, grouped with the *Spectator* which, in the gentleness that informs it, it so much resembles, although, as I think, it is superior to the *Spectator* in rhetorical art. Well does the magazine leave vacant the place it occupied so long. To this king there can be no successor.

Curtis had a voice, as well as a pen. Its opportunity was in the golden age of the lyceum: its superb announcement was in the crucial period of American nationality. Of the lyceum, in whose galaxy shone such lights as Starr King, Henry Ward Beecher, Bayard Taylor, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Edwin H. Chapin, Alonzo Potter, John B. Gough and Wendell Phillips, Curtis soon became "a bright, particular star." Judging by the frequency of his appearance, he was the most popular of the peripatetic host, particularly so with cultivated audiences. In the flush of his early manhood, his presence was especially attractive. His subjects, at the beginning were of an esthetic or social cast. His first lecture, in 1851, was on "Contemporary art in Europe." The Howadji had taken to the platform. Another was on "Gold and Glitter in America," a reflection from the *Potiphar Papers*. There was another, that on "Sir Philip Sidney," which still rings like a melodious measure in many memories, and which also to many seems as introspective as descriptive, obeying in its composition the injunction of Sidney's muse, "Look in thy heart and write;" for who can doubt that Curtis was as knightly a soul as Sidney, and that, even in his extremity, he would have passed the cup to one whose need he thought was greater than his own? As an illustration of the hold that this prose threnody had on public esteem, it may be mentioned that, so late as last March, Curtis was asked to deliver it in

Tacoma, the invitation coming from a man who remembered it as a boy.

But soon his themes were more significant of the time, and his discourse ran in deeper and broader channels. The gravest issues of national honor and human freedom were at stake. The conscience of the north, so long dormant, had become active. Thought was elastic and speech was earnest. The Puritan spark in Curtis was fanned into flame, and glowed and blazed and burned within him. The inspiration asserted itself. He could not be insensible to the obligations of educated men to the state; thereafter he constantly insisted upon their sanctity, and none of his addresses were more fervent, more eloquent or more hopeful than when he elaborated this theme, as at Brown, Union and Lehigh. At the first, he identified himself with the abolitionists, from whom, if he had been observant only of social distinctions, he would have been repelled. Let me not be misapprehended in what I say of the social status of the abolitionists. Some were fit to grace the salons of Versailles, or to sit in the chairs of the Sorbonne. A movement which numbered among its adherents such an erudite scholar as Charles Follen, such a merchant prince as Arthur Tappan and such a finished Christian gentleman as Gerrit Smith could not be destitute of refining elements; but it also comprehended a rougher element — men with more of ardor than urbanity, of zeal than learning, of muscle than manners. Aggression was the essence of abolitionism; agitation was its agency; but it was educating a nation. For it Whittier was singing, Phillips was forging his thunderbolts, Lowell was applying the caustic of his wit to the hideous sore in the body politic, and Curtis was stirred to the impulse of speech, as the Puritan Samuel Adams was so stirred to declare, from the commencement stage at Harvard, that resistance to the crown is lawful if the commonwealth cannot otherwise be preserved, and as the Cavalier Richard Henry Lee was so stirred to proclaim from the floor of the continental congress, that the colonies would

trust to the sword against the edicts of the king ; and thus yielding to his impulse, Curtis became, as another has said, our Puritan Cavalier.

He acted for a time with the abolitionists, but he soon saw that the ultimate object of the new republican party was the extinction of slavery, to be accomplished by constitutional means, and he joined that organization, marching in the vanguard of its column, with Sumner and Wilson, with Wade and Giddings. He took the stump for Fremont, and made many speeches in the memorable initial campaign for republicanism, and by 1860, he had become a recognized republican leader, without, however, seeking or desiring political preferment, although he once accepted a nomination for congress in a district hopelessly democratic. He did not hesitate to identify himself with practical party management. "Honestus" did not shrink from the caucus, and the caucus honored "Honestus." For 25 years he was chairman of the republican committee of his county, was frequently a delegate to state conventions, several times the chairman thereof, and from 1860 to 1884, was a delegate to nearly every national convention of his party.

Meanwhile, his lyceum themes were pertinent to the hour, and his speech grew bolder, taking form and substance from the troublous times in which it was cast. In 1856, it was on "The duty of American scholars to politics and the times." In 1857, it was on "Patriotism." In that year also, it was on "Fair play for Women," the forerunner of his magnificent plea for female suffrage in the New York constitutional convention of 1867 which, for breadth of historical reference, weight of reasoning, and felicity of diction, is unsurpassed among the many persuasive arguments in behalf of that reform, not excepting that of Wendell Phillips at Worcester in 1851. In 1858, his speech was on "Democracy and Education." In 1859, it was on the "Present aspect of the slavery question," and this was delivered in "the city of brotherly love," amid the tumult of the mob and at imminent peril of personal violence ; but it *was* de-

livered. With truth on his side this courtly gentleman did not quail before the howling of the rabble.

When the war was on — when the tremendous issues of national integrity and national dissolution, of human rights and human bondage, were transferred from the forum of debate to the arbitrament of the sword,— the speech of Curtis had a sterner earnestness and a clearer ring. It even thrilled with the pathos of his own affliction, for his brother, a gallant Union soldier, fell at Fredericksburg, and two of his kinsmen by marriage, “curled darlings of Harvard,” but paladins of truth, had glorious death at the serried front, one of whom still has apotheosis for the supreme beauty of his sacrifice. Curtis talked of “National Honor” of the “Good Fight” and, as the climax of his war themes, of the “Way of Peace”— of peace with honor, and as embracing the fullest guarantees of freedom. From the lyceum, his speech broadened into other fields. He was heard at patriotic anniversaries and centennials, at college commencements, at memorial services, at ceremonial banquets, at political conventions, wherever important occasion invoked the fitting word. And he was generous with his transcendent gift, freely responding to demands upon him, until the pressure of professional duties, and the repose necessary to advancing years, made it incumbent upon him to limit somewhat its use.

There is no body of American speeches extant which, for apposite exposition of subject, for wealth of allusions — the side lights that are sometimes brighter than the central lamp — for symmetry of metaphor and relevance of simile and illustration, for expression grammatically, as well as rhetorically, correct, for method and manner, for all the requisites that combine in genuine eloquence, excels that which George William Curtis produced. “He touched nothing that he did not adorn.” There are few events that, through his description, are not invested with a larger meaning than they had before acquired, and there are few men who, as depicted by him, do not tower in loftier stature and are not endowed with nobler disposition and more capa-

cious faculties than had previously been accorded to them. Through him, Bryant draws closer to the heart of nature, and rises in the dignity of his unselfish citizenship. Through him, the Scottish heather blooms afresh and Scottish streams go more gladly gurgling to the sea, while he who sings of them, of "Highland Mary," and "A man's a man for a' that," becomes a bard more dear and a man more lovely, despite his piteous faults. Through him, Phillips is cast in more heroic mould, as he waits for the client who comes in the guise of the bruised and beaten serf, and brooks the ostracism of caste to become the apostle of humanity. Through him, the surrender of Burgoyne has nearer relation to that of Cornwallis, and, through him, as the barge bears the last soldier of Great Britain from the soil of New York, its oars dip to a livelier refrain of joy from the receding shore. Through him, the Pilgrim, whether he dedicates his statue in Central park or glorifies him at a New England dinner, leads the march of civilization down the centuries and across the continent — its herald and its genius. Through him, as he stands upon the spot where the first president of the republic took the oath of office, even the figure of Washington assumes a front more majestic and proportions more colossal than before. To Curtis, more than to any one else, is due the re-creation of George Washington, as the nation he founded, and without whom it could not have been, enters upon the second century of its constitutional existence.

And it must be regarded as a happy circumstance that, on the anniversary of the birth of Washington, preceding his own death, Curtis should have been permitted to make his last memorial address upon a great American, himself born on the 22d of February, who, like Curtis, was of the literati and the illuminati of the land, who, like him, united shining talents with sterling virtues, who, like him, guarded an intelligent patriotism with a sturdy independence, and who, like him, made his art tributary to freedom, to democracy, and to reform. Kindred tastes, pursuits and

culture had cemented between the two a friendship true and tender and tenacious, and Curtis never did finer work than when he wove the chaplet of amaranth and laurel for the brow of James Russell Lowell. This was the last time that his voice was heard upon a theme of any moment, except in an address which he delivered before the National civil service reform league, of which he was, for many years, the president, and to the advancement of whose objects he was long and consistently devoted. On this occasion, he was the recipient of a hearty ovation from the friends of that reform, and he eminently deserved it, as the most conspicuous and unflinching champion of a change in the distribution and tenure of official place, some of the features of which, if adopted, would certainly conserve the efficiency of the public service and relieve it from the evils of the spoils system.

I am not here to adjust the relative position that George William Curtis will hold among the orators of his generation. This would be elusive and impossible, for the standards of oratory are as varying as there are varying audiences and varying moods of audiences to determine them. I have, however, no doubt that his oratory will rank very high, as tried by the rules of the books, as well as by the acclaim of those to whom it was immediately addressed; and as for myself, I frankly say that it was the perfection of rhetorical and elocutionary art. It entranced me as a boy in the old lyceum; the spell did not depart in the many, many hours of rapturous listening in my mature years; and I felt its persuasion still, in the deliberations of this body, and never more than at the last. Ah! how little knew we it was the last. Curtis was a great orator—one of the greatest orators. Less artificial than Everett, he was his equal in affluence of vocabulary. Less vehement than Beecher, he was his superior in nicety of construction. Less scholastic than Sumner, he was his peer in earnestness and excelled him in the orderly sequence of his thought. Less ornate and sonorous and even less magnetic than was

Conkling, in some of his periods, he was of more uniform excellence, and never descended to the lower levels. He had Seward's command of classic English, but he set therein more of the gems of speech, corruscating as from a coronal.

But why indulge in comparisons? Better than the speech of Curtis was the motive that prompted it. Speech, however sound or brilliant, receives its chiefest strength and luster from the man behind it, and this the speech of Curtis had, in a character unsullied, and in a manhood regnant over the seductions of the senses and the temptations to moral obliquities. He may have made mistakes, but he never consciously deflected from the right, nor contracted his ideals. He was honest in every throb of his heart and every fiber of his being, and we say this, unhesitatingly, who have most cause for grief over his later political course—we who had trusted him, had accepted his creed, had sustained his policies;

We that had loved him so, followed him, honored him,  
Lived in his mild and magnificent eye,  
Learned his great language, caught his clear accents,  
Made him our pattern to live and to die!

We say that our lost leader did not wantonly desert us, that not

Just for a handful of silver he left us,  
Just for a ribbon to stick in his coat.

No mean nor sordid motive, no self-seeking actuated him. The issue was a painful one to him, as it was to us, between what appeared an inexorable duty and the ties of dear and old association. He referred the case for decision to the court of conscience, and from that august tribunal there was no appeal. With him, we accepted the decision, not traversing its authority, although keenly regretting its adverse consequences. The suggestion has been made that his course was dictated by the revenge of his employers, based on the loss of pecuniary profits. It is a suggestion as cruel in intent as false in fact. I know, as others know, how

honorable were the relations of Curtis and the firm which, for 40 years, were his publishers. That firm never asked of him any thing which, if granted, would have militated against his self-respect. He was free to support or to oppose men and measures, as every editor worthy of the name should be. The counting room of the Harpers never assumed control of the sanctum. Curtis has more than once told me of the independent position he occupied, not less from their desire than from his own conception of editorial functions. Sometimes it occurred that, after an issue was ended, they said to him that they had not quite agreed with his views, but that he was master of the situation, and they would never think of interfering with his conduct of the paper; and it were an impertinence to intimate that a man of Curtis's sense of the proprieties and self-respect would have remained for a moment in the service of those who claimed to prescribe or regulate his utterances. As editor, his was the sole and unchallenged responsibility.

When all has been said that can be said of the literary and oratorical eminence of George William Curtis, it is, after all, his character that rises superior even to this, and constrains the fullest measure of our admiration. It is true, indeed, that

Spirits are not finely touched,  
But to fine issues,

and that his time did much to educate and to invigorate him; but, at any time and under any circumstances, his character would have been of the finest grain, and those who knew him well knew how fine it was, in its private not less than its public manifestation. He held his honor as "the apple of his eye." He kept his plighted word. He was scrupulous in fulfilling his obligations. He was affable without affectation, and delicately considerate of the feelings of others. No one was ever oppressed by his condescension, nor felt the sting of his unjust rebuke. He was never petulant under provocation, and never lost a becoming deportment. He did not carry his heart upon his sleeve, nor

bestow his confidences promiscuously, but his trust was given where it was deserved, and his friends were attached to him as by "hooks of steel." His home was the abode of a sweet domesticity. His religion was in doing, rather than in professing, in righteous practice, than the repetition of creeds.

His charity was like the snow,  
Soft, white and silent in its fall;  
Not like the noisy winds that blow  
From shivering trees the leaves — a pall  
For flower and weed,  
Dropping below.

No one in the spirit that imbued him and the courtesies he illustrated better deserved "the grand old name of gentleman."

In the ripeness of his years and the fullness of his fame, he was made chancellor of the University of the State of New York. It was the fitting crown of his lettered life and it was an office which he accepted, at your hands, modestly, yet gratefully, with a sincere appreciation of its dignity and intimate knowledge of its requirements. When he was elected, he was the senior regent, having been commissioned in 1864. He sat in the chair of Jay and Verplanck and Kent—an illustrious succession—and had acted four years as vice-chancellor. He had always taken a lively interest in the work of the board, faithfully attending its annual meetings and punctually performing the committee duty assigned him. He was for many years a member of the standing committee on the library, and I clearly recall the zeal and industry he displayed, and the wise and valuable counsel he offered, while serving on the special committee of which the late Hon. Robert S. Hale was chairman, to devise plans for promoting the growth and extending the usefulness of the state library—plans which since matured and amplified, largely under his direction, have unquestionably placed the New York library, in its accumulations, its management and its popularity, at the head of all state institutions of a similar kind. When he

came to the chancellorship, it was with the qualifications of the scholar, profound sympathy with the objects of the board and enlarged ideas of the relations of government to education. He believed that the welfare, not less than the safety, of the state was involved therein, and that while the common school made ample provision for the one, this institution with its congeries of colleges and universities, was the proper custodian of the other. Therefore, he favored all measures which gave it larger powers and he held that an imperial commonwealth, like New York, should grant its largess to the cause of higher learning. The enactments which increased the efficiency of the board by conferring upon it additional responsibilities and those which defined the purpose of and appropriated means for carrying on the democratic scheme of university extension, had alike his earnest support and his vigorous administration. The stately oration, at the centennial of the university, in 1884, is the expression of conservative respect and of poetic sentiment for an institution which, designed by Hamilton and L'Hommedieu, has resisted radical modifications of its original structure, has retained the life tenure of its members as against the sweeping change which has even revolutionized the judiciary, and which in our new American life suggests something of the reverence which broods over the Isis and the Cam. The address at the Convocation in 1890, is a luminous presentation of the objects and jurisdiction of the University, and of the progress it has made, especially in late years, and removes much of the misapprehension that had existed in the popular mind concerning it, showing that it is not effete because it is venerable, and that it has been an active agent in making New York first in education, as she has long been first in trade, in commerce and in population, among the sisterhood of American states. From the time that Curtis took office, in January, 1890, his devotion to his work and his faith in the future of the university grew constantly. He gave to its development much of his thought and personal attention.

He was in touch with all that the higher education still demands. Kindly in his relations with the subordinates in the office, they felt his loss as that of a personal friend. And to the members of the board, how considerate, how courteous, how unassuming he was, so ready to defer his judgment to that of others, so just, and yet so amiable. In that long roll of chancellors, which stalwart George Clinton heads, and which includes the names of Jay and Tompkins and Pruyn, none were worthier of the place than was George William Curtis, as none had more discriminating perception of its importance, nor in it did nobler service than he, during the brief period he was permitted to grace it.

When one, who has been esteemed great in art, or letters, or statesmanship, dies, speculation busies itself as to the durability of his fame. Will he be forgotten, or will his be

One of the few, the immortal names  
That were not born to die?

And the door of the future closes the eager quest. How short will be the catalogue of those who have enduring recognition, although none may gainsay the tremendous propulsions of the race. Where are the speeches that have been made, the songs that have been sung, the books that have been written? There are echoless voids, and they are "to dumb forgetfulness a prey;" and unmindful of them, though may be inspired by them, the mighty processions sweep onward to decay:

And the individual withers, and the world is more and more.

Nothing can be more misleading than contemporary verdict upon literary productions. One age rejects what a preceding age cherishes, and one rescues from neglect that which the other contemns. Shakespeare and Milton had new birth and the dust of the dark ages was thick upon Horace and Virgil. The lesser dramatists of the Elizabethan era expected to live and the wits of Grub street thought to destroy Pope. The martyrs of to-day are the

heroes of to-morrow. I expect that George William Curtis will live in the lines he has written, that the *Easy Chair* will be a delight to the coming generations, that *Prue and I* will be perused at the firesides of the newer time, and that some of his addresses will be read hereafter with the zest with which we read those of Sheridan and Burke, of Henry and Webster; but I know that he will be immortal in the principles he advocated, in the reforms he advanced, in the work he did for education and humanity, in his gentle life, an example to follow, incarnate virtue to emulate. He lives and will live.

He is a portion of the loveliness  
Which once he made more lovely; he doth bear  
His part, while the one spirit's plastic stress  
Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there  
All new successions to the forms they wear.













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